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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000038

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/PASCUAL/RAMCHAND

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/06/2019
TAGS: [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#)
SUBJECT: GAZA CONTACTS DESCRIBE DANGERS AND HARDSHIP CAUGHT
BETWEEN HAMAS AND THE IDF

REF: A. JERUSALEM 00017
[1](#)B. JERUSALEM 00030

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On the third day of IDF ground operations in Gaza, ConGen contacts gave various accounts of life in Gaza, including a home eviction by Hamas, a midnight IDF phone call, and the inability to move between the north and south. End Summary.

AMIDEAST EMPLOYEE IN RAFAH
FORCED TO EVACUATE FROM BORDER
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[1](#)2. (C) Amideast Gaza employee Samer al-Jamal told PDOff that he was forced to evacuate his home near the Rafah crossing due to the intensity of the IAF strikes along the border. He moved to another house in Rafah, where he has been without electricity or water for the past 36 hours. The land line telephone is also out of service. Jamal said the airstrikes are not as intense in his area of town, and are more concentrated around the nearby refugee camp. He added that he had seen no sign of IDF tanks or ground troops approaching Rafah. He believed that IDF troops have occupied the now-defunct Gaza airport (in the south-eastern corner of the strip) and a three-kilometer strip inside the Gaza-Israel border.

AMIDEAST DIRECTOR: WORST NIGHT YET
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[1](#)3. (C) Amideast Gaza Director Anees Abu Hashem, who lives in the Gaza City neighborhood of Rimal, told PDOff that the night of January 4 was the worst yet during the conflict for him and his family. At one point, his building shook as though "there had been an earthquake." Later in the night, he received a phone call from a voice recording in Arabic saying: "This is the Israeli Defence Forces. We are very strong. If Hamas continues to resist, then we will hit Gaza even harder." Abu Hashem told PDOff that the sounds of fighting had continued throughout the day.

[1](#)4. (C) Regarding the recent IAF strike on the American International School in Gaza (AISG), located in Beit Lahiya, Abu Hashem said he spoke with the school principal, who told him the school compound had not been used for militant activity, but that militants have been operating in the area around the school.

CONTINUED ODYSSEY OF AMERICAN CORNER DIRECTOR
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[1](#)5. (C) As reported in reftels, Gaza American Corner director Awni Karzon has been forced to move twice with his family since his apartment in Gaza City was partially destroyed by an IAF strike. After he had found a relatively "safe"

location on the coast near Gaza City, Karzon reported to PDOff, he was forced to vacate again after 18 Hamas fighters came and forced his family out of the building, along with five other families who were resident there. When Dr. Karzon's wife pleaded with the fighters to go away for the sake of the women and children, the militants replied, "What about our kids? You don't care about Hamas lives and families." Dr. Karzon tried more forcefully to persuade the group to leave, but they rebuffed him and threatened to shoot him, saying the building had been officially requisitioned for Hamas military activity.

¶6. (C) Karzon has now moved to a friend's apartment, with 30 individuals living under one roof. There is no water, food is scarce, and they get only two hours of electricity per day through the building's generator. Karzon added that several families in the neighborhood - more than 200 people - have banded together to prevent any Hamas fighters from entering or using their buildings as bases for militant activity. Hamas has sent some fighters in to "test the waters," according to Karzon, but the "community watch" group has told them firmly to leave the area immediately.

¶7. (C) Karzon added that, among his friends and neighbors, there is no sympathy for Hamas. He said they want the Gaza assault to end and, if the IDF enters Gaza City and creates a safe environment, they will be welcomed. Among non-Hamas supporters, he says there is anger against Israel only because of the killing and the humanitarian crisis. He asks that Israel "please have mercy on civilians," adding that life in Gaza is miserable and people are living "like gypsies" and are desperate for water. He added that people

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would welcome a 24- or 48-hour humanitarian truce so that the wounded can be taken to hospital and the worst cases moved to Egypt or Israel. It would also give people the opportunity to repair damages to water and electricity services. Karzon remarked that there are people - dead and alive - trapped under the rubble of demolished buildings, and that one can hear the survivors calling for help, though no one can reach them.

IDF POSITIONS BLOCKS MOVEMENT BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH
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¶8. (C) WHO Gaza Director Mahmoud Daher noted to EconOff that a family of 11 was killed last night by an IAF missile strike near Deir el-Balah. He said that no ambulances were able to reach the strike site due to the IDF presence. More than thirty people injured in the strike have yet to receive professional health care, despite numerous calls by the injured to hospitals and the ICRC. Daher mentioned that the WHO and ICRC are trying to coordinate the transfer of 17 other injured patients by ambulances from Gaza City to Rafah, underscoring that Gaza City emergency rooms and ICUs are filled beyond capacity.

¶9. (C) Amideast Director Abu Hasham noted that the IDF is holding a line running from Karni crossing to the Beach Road, splitting Gaza between north and south. It is now nearly impossible for anyone to move between the two zones. Shifaa Hospital in Gaza City is facing even further staff shortages as some of their employees live south of the line and are unable to get to work. Radio stations have broadcast appeals to anyone with medical experience to help with the wounded. Abu Hashem said that he expects the IDF to advance into urban areas, but warned they would likely face heavy resistance from militants.

WALLES